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Social Disorganization Theory

“When the Towers Come Down”

On a December morning in 1989, amid a snowstorm, Annie Ricks let her third-oldest son, Cornelius, stay home from middle school. For months, she and her eight children had been sleeping on the floors of relatives' apartments or in the lobby of the Cook County Hospital. She had lived on Chicago's West Side, within the same few blocks, since moving there as a 10-year-old from a segregated mill town in Alabama. But her West Side apartment and every belonging in it had burned in a fire. Without a fixed address, she stopped receiving the public-assistance checks that had helped stretch what she earned in a factory molding plaster figurines.

When she considered the fact of her predicament, it simply didn't make sense: *Annie Jeffery Ricks was homeless?* At 33, she'd been providing since she was a teenager. Her children were well fed and neatly dressed, their hair combed and cut and braided. The girls as well as the boys played basketball, and Ricks volunteered in their classrooms and attended their games. She had never before considered public housing and knew nothing of Cabrini-Green's reputation—that it had entered the pantheon of proper names of the scariest places in urban America. But she had put in an application and couldn't wait any longer. She told Cornelius they were going to get their apartment that day and walk the seven miles to Cabrini-Green in the snow.

Ricks was shown a 15-story plain box of a high-rise, a giant filing cabinet with a facade the color of cigarette-stained teeth. The elevators were out of order, the stairwells dark. Built in stages beginning in the 1940s on Chicago's Near North Side, Cabrini-Green consisted of barracks-style row houses and 23 towers. When Ricks arrived, more than a third of the 3,600 units were vacant. The Chicago Housing Authority said it couldn't afford to do

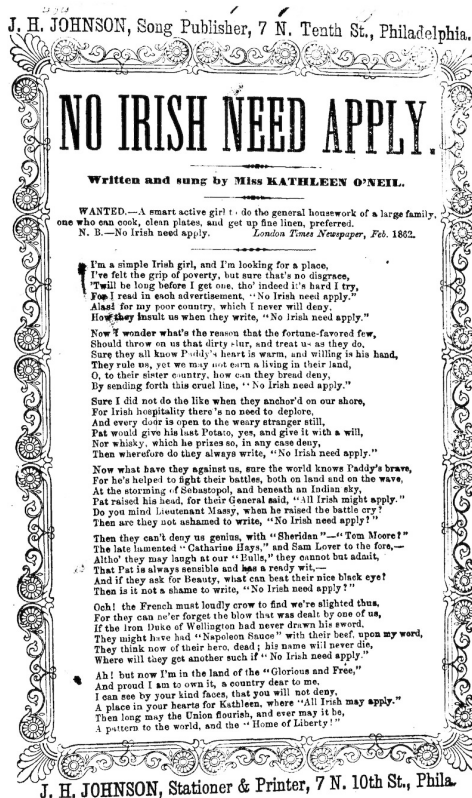
the repairs to ready them for occupancy, and not just at Cabrini. The C.H.A. had a stock of 42,000 apartments, but the number in use had fallen to fewer than 33,000.

The vacant fifth-floor apartment Ricks entered looked like a crypt. Plywood covered the windows. The kitchen cabinets dangled or were missing altogether. Ricks surveyed the surroundings, counting four bedrooms. There was a full bathroom on one side of the unit and a half bath on the other. The front room was large enough for a dining table and a sofa, and it was connected to the kitchen, which (she checked) had a working stove and refrigerator. The ceilings were high, the walls made of seemingly indestructible cinder block. Ricks had freckles that wandered the bridge of her nose and reached her high cheekbones, which now sharpened to points as she smiled. *What she saw looked like a home* [emphasis added].

The description above begins a story from the *New York Times* (Austen, 2018) that describes the fall of public housing in Chicago and the story of Annie Ricks and her family as they struggled to survive in the poorest of circumstances in the wealthiest of nations. Ms. Ricks worked hard at a number of jobs and successfully raised a large family, all in the midst of severe economic deprivation, drug abuse and dealing, and rampant crime and violence. In fact, one of her nephews barely survived bullet wounds that came through her apartment window. She lived in the impoverished high-rise in Cabrini-Green for over 20 years as the buildings, just like hers, were being demolished in large part for a new urban development that she and others like her could never afford. Only a few blocks away, the new development included “a new library and police station, new shopping and upscale housing. The school, too, had been renamed and given a makeover, and it now served only those students who tested in, ranking it among the best elementaries in Illinois.” She was finally formally kicked out of the projects not for failing to pay her rent or for drugs or criminal behavior. She was forced out to make way for the new and wealthy expansion for a very different population and strata in society.

Introduction

Austen (2018) provides an interesting introduction to **social disorganization theory**, a theory developed to explain patterns of deviance and crime across social locations, such as neighborhoods. More importantly, social disorganization theory emphasizes changes in urban areas like those seen in Chicago decade after decade. The story of Annie Ricks and her family is a story of change. The poverty, crime, and deviance at Cabrini-Green were nothing next to the despair she felt after being homeless, and she stayed because she found a “home” and built a life for herself and her family. When she moved out of Cabrini-Green, the mobility was not up, but rather to a new impoverished area with obvious drug dealing, crime, and violence. The scenario did not change much for Ms. Ricks and her family except for the fact that they didn’t know anyone in the new neighborhood and they felt less safe because they did not know others.



Library of Congress (1862), Rare Book and Special Collections Division.
America Singing: Nineteenth-Century Song Sheets.

PHOTO 5.1

Immigrants faced many problems when they arrived in the United States at the turn of the century, including discrimination.

in areas such as Cabrini-Green and many neighborhoods in urban areas. Alternatively, other places seem to be able to control crime and deviance (or at least the deviance that does exist is far less visible). Social disorganization theory attempts to explain this variation. Why are certain neighborhoods able to control levels of deviance while others are unable to minimize it or eliminate it entirely? Social disorganization theory assumes that most people do not want to live in unsafe neighborhoods with high levels of delinquency, crime, and deviance. However, because of various structural conditions to be discussed, some people are not able to work together to achieve common goals.

In this chapter, we begin with some history behind the theory of social disorganization, including the creation of a major program in sociology at the University of Chicago toward the end of the 19th century and the social milieu of Chicago at that point in time. We then discuss the development of social disorganization theory and early empirical tests of the theory, which were focused primarily on juvenile delinquency. Historically, the theory was put on the back burner for many years only to come back strong in the 1980s. We discuss this revitalization as well as new advances of the theory. Today, social disorganization theory and variants of it are reasonably popular and are used quite often when investigating deviance at the aggregate level: neighborhoods, schools, cities, and even internationally.

Unlike many of the micro-level theories discussed in this book, which attempt to explain variation in deviant behavior across individuals, social disorganization theory is a macro-level theory that focuses on larger units of analysis, such as neighborhoods, schools, cities, and even states or countries. This is a unique contribution because it is so clear that some places are safer than others and deviance is rare, controlled, or hidden and that all sorts of deviances flourish in other places. Rodney Stark (1987) accurately described a major problem in the study of crime and deviance stemming from the advent of self-report surveys:

This transformation soon led repeatedly to the "discovery" that poverty is unrelated to delinquency. . . . Yet, through it all, social scientists somehow knew better than to stroll the street at night in certain parts of town or even to park there. And despite the fact that countless surveys showed that kids from upper and lower income families scored the same on delinquency batteries, even social scientists know that the parts of town that scared them were not upper-income neighborhoods. (p. 894)

Indeed, violence, drug use, prostitution, mental illness, and other forms of deviance are commonplace in areas such as Cabrini-Green and many neighborhoods in urban areas. Alternatively, other places seem to be able to control crime and deviance (or at least the deviance that does exist is far less visible). Social disorganization theory attempts to explain this variation. Why are certain neighborhoods able to control levels of deviance while others are unable to minimize it or eliminate it entirely? Social disorganization theory assumes that most people do not want to live in unsafe neighborhoods with high levels of delinquency, crime, and deviance. However, because of various structural conditions to be discussed, some people are not able to work together to achieve common goals.

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DEVIANCE IN POPULAR CULTURE

When people are asked what causes crime and deviance, they tend to think in terms of individualistic causes of deviance. That is, they are looking to answer why certain individuals engage in crime and deviant behavior and others do not. Why do some people use hard drugs and others abstain? Why do some young males and females go into prostitution while others live “cleaner lives”? Why do some professionals “cheat” while others do not, even if they are pretty sure “cheating is lucrative,” and they could get away with it? The social disorganization perspective asks a different question: Why is there more crime in certain areas than in others? *What community-level characteristics influence the rate of crime or deviance in any given area?*

The documentary film *Hoop Dreams* follows two young boys from inner-city Chicago as they are recruited into a private high school and different colleges in pursuit of their goal of basketball stardom. Watch the first 45 minutes of *Hoop Dreams* (freshman and sophomore years of high school), paying careful attention to the different environments that are captured on tape.

What did you notice about the neighborhoods that Arthur and William grew up and lived in? What did the neighborhoods look like? What kinds of things went on there? What did people say about these areas?

Now think about the neighborhood in which the high school, St. Joe's, is located. What did it look like? What did people say about it?

Which neighborhood do you think had higher crime rates? Why do you think so? What are the important characteristics to consider?

Think about the neighborhood that you grew up in. What was it like? What factors do you think contributed to the crime rates (high or low) in your neighborhood?

If you were trying to lower crime or deviance rates in a given neighborhood, where would you start? What specifically would you target and try to improve?

Documentary films can sometimes tell us a great deal about deviance and social control, even if that is not the expressed intent of the story. The Chicago neighborhoods shown in *Hoop Dreams* have very different levels of social organization, which affect levels of crime and deviance and the life chances of individuals such as Arthur and William and their family members. Considering the neighborhood you grew up in as an additional case study can help to illustrate how social disorganization affects communities—and how it may have affected you and your friends, even though you may not have realized it at the time. Applying the theories to real examples helps to remind us that these are more than big ideas—deviance is all around us, and sociological theories can help us make sense of our own social worlds.

Development of Social Disorganization Theory

To provide context for an understanding of the theory of social disorganization, we need to go back to the end of the 19th century and the transition to the 20th. Consider Chicago at the turn of the century (perhaps not so different in terms of deviance than it is today—plenty to go around!). Many of the new faculty members at the University of Chicago at that time were from rural and religious backgrounds. They were coming to Chicago, a city where crime and deviance were not hard to find—indeed, they were right in your face. Gambling, prostitution, alcohol consumption, violence, police



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PHOTO 5.2

What challenges do immigrants face in America today?

explanations. The criminals and deviants were the “new immigrants.” Immigrants who brought their old traditions and who had not been appropriately socialized into the new world were seen as the causes of the social problems of the day. Of course, at different times, different groups felt the brunt of ethnic prejudice and were seen as the cause of various social ills. For example, Irish and Italian immigrants faced ethnic discrimination in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and were seen as a source of trouble. Indeed, in 1918, when labor was in high demand and employers were scrounging for workers, advertisements read “Italians and Coloreds” may apply, suggesting an ethnic stratification ranking of Italians as close to African Americans (Luhman, 2002). German Jews immigrating to the United States during the early to mid-1800s because of the repression and discrimination in Germany faced fewer legal restrictions here, but there were still some, including restrictions from “holding public office, becoming lawyers, and serving as officers in state militia” in certain regions (Luhman, 2002, p. 149). Immigration from China, beginning around 1850, also brought political and social reaction, leading to Chinese immigrants being viewed as deviant. Hispanics, too, have faced ethnic stereotyping and discrimination as evidenced by the editorials, discussion, and debate generated in the early 2000s that continued to be a major political issue throughout the 2016 presidential election. Finally, coming to America as slaves, African Americans have always faced prejudice and discrimination, but as they moved from the South to northern cities, they too became the scapegoat and the “cause” of social problems.

Fortunately, science was also making important discoveries and influencing how we thought about deviance and other social problems. The Chicago school was very familiar with scientific strides being made in plant and animal biology. For example, Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, published in 1859, was well known to Chicago sociologists and influenced how they approached the study of human behavior. In contrast to the classical school of criminology, which focused on free will and the role of the government in controlling free will, the Chicago perspective did not ask whether plants “willed” themselves to do better in certain environments than others or whether animals “willed” themselves to reproduce and thrive in certain areas versus others. Rather, its proponents believed that environmental factors affected where certain

abuse of power, and many other forms of deviance were common and well known to the citizens of Chicago. The question for these researchers was why these forms of deviance existed and seemed to flourish in certain areas of the city while other areas seemed to be able to control these “social problems.”

Alternatively, how did people in general explain deviance at the turn of the century? In other words, what were the popular explanations of crime and deviance? Much like today, the explanations focused on individuals and groups—that is, “types of people”

plants and animals would thrive, and other plants and animals would flourish in others. The early Chicago researchers believed that they could find the causes of crime in the structure of the environment. Much like today, thanks to the explosion of information and analysis provided by geographic information systems, such as MapQuest, Google Earth, and a host of statistical software programs for analyzing geography, the principle of the Chicago school was that if you want to understand something, *map it!* Through this process of mapping social deviance, researchers were able to demonstrate that “types of people” explanations were often limited, if not downright wrong. Indeed, certain types of deviance seemed to flourish in some areas over time, even though the “types of people” (racial and ethnic groups) who lived there changed dramatically.

Shaw and McKay’s Study of Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas

Based on R. E. Park, Burgess, and McKenzie’s (1925/1967) human ecology approach, the origin of social disorganization theory is generally attributed to Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay’s (1942/1969) seminal work, *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*, in which they plotted on maps the home addresses of (1) boys brought to court for an alleged delinquent activity, (2) boys committed by the court to a correctional facility, and (3) “boys dealt with by the police probation officers with or without court appearance” (p. 44). Data on court cases and commitments were available for 1900, 1920, and 1930, and police contacts centered around 1930. As the authors noted, “The distribution of delinquents at different periods of time afford the basis for comparison and for analysis of long-term trends and processes that could not be made for a single period” (Shaw & McKay, 1942/1969, p. 45). Their maps clearly show three things. First, delinquency did not appear to be distributed randomly across the neighborhoods of Chicago. Second, rates of delinquency appeared to cluster in certain neighborhoods and appeared highest close to the **central business district** (CBD). Shaw and McKay noted that in addition to the high rates of delinquency near the CBD, delinquency was highest in neighborhoods in or around business and industrial areas, often referred to as mixed land use. Third, delinquency, by and large, tended to decline as one moved away from the CBD. Indeed, their analyses clearly showed that rates of delinquency as measured by juvenile commitments across five **concentric zones** around 1900, 1920, and 1930 fell precipitously as one moved away from the CBD.

Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) examined these zones and characterized Zone II, the one closest to the CBD, as a **zone in transition**. Here resided the most recent immigrants to the city, the poorest and least educated citizens, and those who needed to live close to the CBD for work—when they could find it. Shaw and McKay found that as one moved away from the zones in transition, one would find residents from earlier waves of immigrants. These were people who had learned English, had received more education, had better jobs, and could afford to get out of the impoverished inner city where only those who had no other choice lived. What was most interesting was that the people who lived in the zone in transition changed. Indeed, no one really wanted

to live there, and immigrants quickly left the high-crime-rate and deviant areas for safer neighborhoods as soon as they could afford to, only to be replaced by another group of immigrants who were forced to live in the zone in transition.

To better understand why crime rates declined as one moved out from the inner city, Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) looked to other social factors that characterized these areas. So other than high rates of delinquency, what characterized these neighborhoods? Shaw and McKay highlighted three factors that characterized neighborhoods with high rates of delinquency: **poverty, population turnover, and racial/ethnic heterogeneity**. Shaw and McKay did not emphasize a direct link between poverty and delinquency (Bursik, 1988). Rather, they found that poor neighborhoods were characterized by population turnover and racial/ethnic heterogeneity. Bursik (1988) argues that “in its purest formulation, social disorganization refers to the inability of local communities to realize the common values of their residents or solve commonly experienced problems” (p. 521). When the primary goal of the residents is to move out of the neighborhood, there is little incentive to try to make it a better place. These people were poor and did not own their own residences, and the landlords (“slumlords”) had little interest in making these neighborhoods better places to live. In fact, it was in their best interest to invest as little as possible in their apartment buildings and other structures because, as the city expanded, they would be bought out and their buildings torn down and replaced with industrial structures. Similarly, because the populations were changing and composed of people with different ethnic and/or racial backgrounds, further barriers existed, such as limited motivation to work together to reduce the crime and other deviance that characterized the area. These structural factors (poverty, population turnover, and racial/ethnic heterogeneity) consistently characterized high-delinquency areas, even though the specific “types of people” changed over the decades studied.

Critiques of Social Disorganization Theory

Shaw and McKay’s (1942/1969) pioneering work in social disorganization theory was sharply criticized on a number of grounds and then waned in popularity and importance for several reasons, as described in a review by Bursik (1988). First, the field of criminology shifted and became far more focused on individuals as opposed to groups, and macro-level theories such as social disorganization rarely have anything to say about individuals, only groups and places. Second, **longitudinal data** (data collected over time) are expensive and sometimes impossible to collect, and later studies typically were restricted to **cross-sectional designs** (data collected at only one point in time). Cross-sectional designs are problematic in the study of deviance, especially studies of a theory based on longitudinal data, because they typically assume a static view of urban life that seems inconsistent with history. Finally, there was considerable confusion about what social disorganization actually was and how it should be measured. In particular, there seemed to be some confusion in distinguishing social disorganization from delinquency itself, resulting in criticisms that the theory was tautological—that is, true by definition, circular, and, therefore, not testable. However, a number of important works in the late 1970s and 1980s gave social disorganization theory a rebirth.

Rebirth of Social Disorganization Theory

In her classic work, *Social Sources of Delinquency*, Ruth Kornhauser (1978) divided the classic theories of juvenile delinquency into three basic types: cultural deviance (e.g., differential association and social learning; see Chapter 6), strain (see Chapter 4), and social disorganization. She clearly puts social disorganization as a macro-level control theory whereby residents of certain neighborhoods are able to control and minimize unwanted deviance while residents in other neighborhoods, characterized by poverty, population turnover, and racial/ethnic heterogeneity, cannot control their environments and achieve common goals. Although Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) discussed the subculture found in socially disorganized neighborhoods, Kornhauser and others who followed tended to focus solely on the structural aspects of the theory. Following this important work, a number of scholars began reflecting on and promoting the potential of the theory. Stark (1987), for example, used social disorganization theory along with 100 years' worth of theorizing and empirical research on social ecology to develop 30 propositions linking neighborhood characteristics to high rates of deviance, including "(1) density; (2) poverty; (3) mixed [land] use; (4) transience; and (5) dilapidation" (p. 895).

In turn, Bursik (1988) documented the reasons for the decline in the popularity of the social disorganization theory and suggested several lines for pursuing the theory, including (1) thinking about the neighborhood as a social context for individual behavior; (2) focusing on measures of deviance, such as self-reported behavior and victimization surveys, that are not the result of official responses by law enforcement; and (3) considering the possible feedback effects of crime and delinquency on social disorganization (the ability to control the environment). Finally, several studies were conducted that empirically tested the validity of the theory.

Empirical Tests of Social Disorganization Theory

Structural Correlates of Crime and Deviance

Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) observed that high rates of delinquency are found in areas of high economic deprivation (e.g., percentage living in poverty, percentage unemployed), population turnover, and racial/ethnic heterogeneity. The first correlate, economic deprivation, was not given a great deal of theoretical or empirical attention by Shaw and McKay. Rather they thought that the effect of economic deprivation was mostly mediated by population turnover and racial/ethnic heterogeneity. That is, those who had very limited resources were quite restricted in where they were able to live, and often that meant living with other groups that they, for a variety of reasons, were not terribly happy to live among. Living with people different from oneself hinders the ability to collectively work toward common goals such as minimizing crime, delinquency, and other deviant behavior. Once families secured enough money, it made sense to move on to "bigger and brighter" neighborhoods, and thus there was a consistent outflow of residents with the means to do so, with a constant stream of new immigrants all too ready to fill the void. Population turnover

also reduced people's ability to achieve common goals because neighbors come and go and there is limited ability or desire to work together. Thus, economic deprivation was important, but secondary to residential mobility and racial/ethnic composition.

Economic Deprivation: Direct and Indirect Effects

There is little doubt that economic deprivation, measured in a variety of ways, is related to crime and other forms of deviance. Travis C. Pratt and Francis T. Cullen's (2005) meta-analysis ranks poverty in the top 10 macro-level predictors of crime. Their review includes 153 unique comparisons found in the literature between poverty and crime with mean effect size of .250, which is statistically significant and relatively robust for relationships found in meta-analyses.

Racial heterogeneity (percentage black ranked 7 and a racial heterogeneity index with which measures of diversity across various races and ethnicities ranked 15) and residential mobility (ranked 17) were also ranked as strong correlates of crime in the Pratt and Cullen (2005) meta-analysis.

Probably the most sophisticated test of the roles that racial composition/heterogeneity play in mediating the effects of economic disadvantage on crime comes from Bursik and Grasmick (1993). Employing sophisticated measurement techniques and statistical means, they attempt to tease out the effects of economic deprivation through its effects on population instability or turnover and racial/ethnic heterogeneity.

They find that both racial/ethnic heterogeneity and population instability do directly affect crime and furthermore that economic deprivation indirectly affects crime through its positive association with racial/ethnic heterogeneity and population instability. Each of these causal linkages are consistent with Shaw and McKay's (1942/1969) and Bursik and Grasmick's (1993) theoretical insights. However, economic deprivation also exerts a statistically significant and robust direct effect on crime over and above its indirect effects. The Bursik and Grasmick model is demonstrated in Figure 5.1.

FIGURE 5.1 ● Bursik and Grasmick's (1993) Model to Better Understand the Interplay of Structural Characteristics on Crime and Deviance

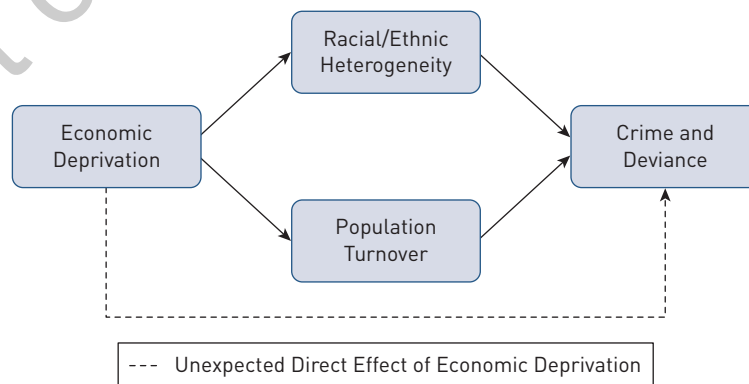
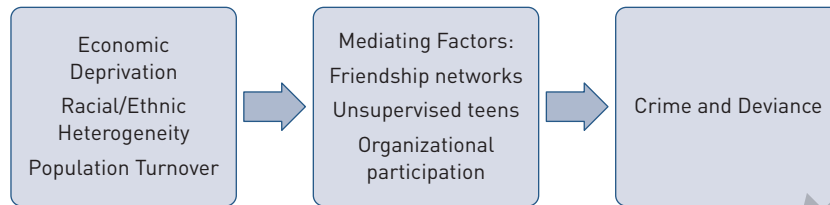


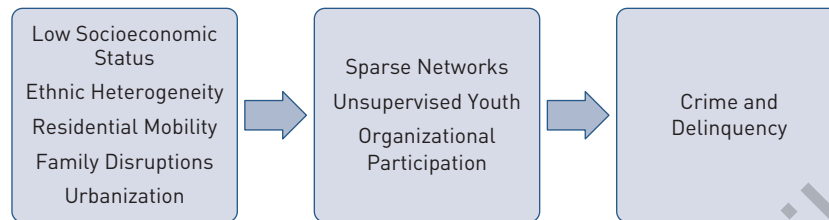
FIGURE 5.2 • Sampson and Groves's (1989) Model to Better Understand the Role of Structural Characteristics of Neighborhoods and Crime and Deviance



Following Bursik and Grasmick's (1993) seminal piece, one of the next innovations and empirical tests of the social disorganization theory involved consideration of the mediating factors hypothesized between the social structural variables identified by Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) and crime and delinquency. That is, if economic deprivation, population turnover, and racial/ethnic diversity impede the ability for residents to achieve common goals like reducing delinquency, crime, and other forms of deviant behavior, then Sampson and Groves (1989) argued that sparse friendship networks, unsupervised teen peer groups, and low organizational participation should largely explain the relationship between poverty, ethnic heterogeneity, population turnover, family disruption, and urbanization. That is, neighborhoods characterized by these factors would be less able to control certain forms of deviance because residents would not be communicating with one another and would allow teens to roam the streets unsupervised. This model elaboration, compared to that of Bursik and Gramick, is described in Figure 5.2.

Sampson and Groves (1989) analyzed data from the 1982 British Crime Survey (BCS), which included data on more than 10,000 respondents across 238 localities in England and Wales, and then they replicated the analyses using data from a slightly larger number of individuals residing in 300 British communities. They found that neighborhoods with sparse friendship networks, unsupervised teenage peer groups, and low organizational participation were associated with higher rates of victimization and self-reported offending (violence and property crimes) and that these variables explained much of the effect of the standard structural variables generally used to test social disorganization theory.

About a decade later, Veysey and Messner (1999) replicated these analyses using slightly more sophisticated statistical modeling techniques. They were more cautious in their interpretation of the results of their analyses in terms of the theory. They found that the mediating social disorganization variables (sparse friendships, unsupervised teens, and organizational participation) only partially explained the effects of the structural variables and argued that the results were only partially consistent with social disorganization theory but were also consistent with theories focused on peer affiliation, such as differential association theory (see Chapter 6). Again using the BCS but this time with data from more than a decade later, Lowenkamp, Cullen, and Pratt (2003) replicated Sampson and Groves's (1989) model using similar measures.

FIGURE 5.3 ● Sampson and Groves's (1989) Model of Social Disorganization

The results were largely consistent, and the authors argued that the consistency of the findings suggests that Sampson and Groves's model was not an idiosyncratic result of the timing of the original study but that the theoretical model is generalizable across time (see Figure 5.3).

Classic social disorganization theory has continued to be tested in other environments. For example, given that Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) and many others have focused on urban environments, some have questioned whether the theory is applicable to nonurban areas. Osgood and Chambers (2000) examined the structural correlates of juvenile homicide, rape, weapon offenses, and simple-assault arrest rates across 264 nonmetropolitan counties in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and Nebraska. They found that population turnover, family disruption, and ethnic heterogeneity were all related to most juvenile arrest statistics.

Most recently, Moore and Sween (2015) provided a partial replication of Osgood and Chambers's (2000) work, except they expanded the sample to all ($n = 2,011$) nonmetropolitan counties in fully 48 states (excluding Alaska and Hawaii); a few of the independent variables were slightly different, and the statistical analyses were slightly different as well. They, too, found that residential instability and ethnic heterogeneity were consistent predictors across juvenile crimes. Family disruption was related to total violent crimes and robbery; population density was related to homicide and robbery; and poverty was related to homicide. These studies suggest that social disorganization variables shown to "work" in urban areas can also predict juvenile crime in rural counties. Residential instability and ethnic heterogeneity appeared to be the most consistent predictors of each of the violent crimes measured, as Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) would have hypothesized, but there is some evidence that poverty and population density play some role in predicting some juvenile crime.

A criticism raised against Shaw and McKay's (1942/1969) original analyses and many other analyses is the focus on official measures of crime. However, Sampson and Groves's (1989) classic analysis as well as replications (Lowencamp et al., 2003; Veysey & Messner, 1999) with self-reported offending and victimization with the BCS clearly show the generalizability of the theory. In an interesting approach, Warner and Pierce (1993) used calls to police, rather than reactions by the police (e.g., arrests), across 60 Boston neighborhoods in 1980 and found support for social disorganization theory. Finally, while most studies have focused on juvenile delinquency and street crimes, Benson, Wooldredge, and Thistlethwaite (2004) found that neighborhood

factors associated with social disorganization theory affect both black and white rates of domestic violence.

As the reader might surmise, the theory of social disorganization has largely focused on delinquency and street crimes, especially violent street crimes, rather than on other forms of deviance, especially what might be seen as “soft deviance.” This is not entirely the case, however, as even early researchers were interested in how social disorganization theory might help us understand the geographic concentration of mental illness, prostitution, gambling, alcoholism, and drug use. Some recent research continues in this tradition.

Eric Silver (2000) examined the structural correlates of violence, but his focus was on the mentally ill, whereas most research had previously only examined individual-level variables, such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status. He obtained data on 270 psychiatric patients discharged from the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The patients had been treated for a variety of mental disorders, including schizophrenia, depression, mania, and alcohol or drug dependence, among others. Violence was measured via self-report, “collateral” reports (i.e., reports from someone who knew the respondent well and had frequent interactions), and official records. Neighborhood-level variables included a composite measure of socioeconomic disadvantage and population turnover. Although population turnover was unrelated to violence, socioeconomic disadvantage was related to violence in bivariate analyses as well as in multivariate models controlling for a host of individual-level characteristics.

Another study by Hayes-Smith and Whaley (2009) focused on social disorganization and methamphetamine use. While the Silver (2000) study focused on individuals and the neighborhoods around their homes, Hayes-Smith and Whaley studied school districts in Michigan. Self-reported data collected via an anonymous survey of eighth-, tenth-, and twelfth-grade students, about a third from each grade, were aggregated to the school district ($n = 202$). District characteristics included low socioeconomic status, residential instability, racial composition, and family disruption, among others. Findings showed that—consistent with social disorganization theory—methamphetamine use was consistently and positively related to low socioeconomic status and population instability. Interestingly, in contrast to social disorganization theory, racial/ethnic heterogeneity was negatively related to methamphetamine use, whereas the percentage of whites was positively related to it, suggesting that methamphetamine use may be more common among whites than racial minorities. The suburban, urban, and rural variables were significant in some models but not others. When significant, the results seemed to suggest that methamphetamine use may be higher in suburban and rural areas. Overall, the data largely support social disorganization theory, and this study adds to the literature by focusing on a relatively new and disturbing form of substance use across urban and rural school districts. Edwards (2010) examined neighborhood characteristics in urban counties in Texas where three types of sexually oriented businesses existed: adult sexuality boutiques, adult entertainment clubs, and adult bookstores. Using social disorganization theory, she critiqued the placement of these different businesses and the impact of race, class, and gender on their placement.

She determined the existence of the three types of sexually oriented businesses using a generally agreed-upon definition of each type of business. First, adult sexuality boutiques are more likely to be run by women and often emphasize “party favors,” erotic clothing, and even female sexual health. Second, adult entertainment clubs are usually clubs that specialize in nude or topless dancing by females and usually cater to men. Finally, adult bookstores also sell sexual paraphernalia like adult sexuality boutiques, but these stores usually specialize in the sale or rental of pornographic videos and magazines and cater to male clientele.

Edwards (2010) found that adult sexuality boutiques are more likely to be in socially organized and cohesive neighborhoods, whereas adult entertainment clubs and bookstores are more likely to be in socially disorganized neighborhoods. While white men are the predominant clientele of both adult entertainment clubs and adult bookstores, the disorganized neighborhoods the businesses are in are more likely to be lower-income neighborhoods with higher rates of minority residents. This suggests that “certain groups are able to keep their neighborhoods separated from [certain] sexually oriented businesses, while also maintaining anonymity if they choose to visit these businesses” (Edwards, 2010, p. 155).



Global Perspectives on Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory is clearly an American-born theory, rooted in the Chicago school of sociology. Indeed, stemming from the original theoretical and empirical work by Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) in the early 1900s, work in this tradition continues to the present day (e.g., Sampson, 2012). Of course, the theory has been tested in other major U.S. cities, such as New York, Chicago, and St. Louis, among others. The theory was originally developed to explain neighborhood variation in delinquency and crime across relatively small macro units, but there is clearly reason to believe that the same general structural characteristics (i.e., economic deprivation, population instability, and racial/ethnic heterogeneity) may operate at other levels to explain various forms of crime and deviance. For example, social disorganization theory has also been applied to schools, cities, and states within the United States. There is also reason to believe that social disorganization is a general macro-level theory of crime that can be applied to other countries and across nations that vary in levels of informal social control.

Recently, several efforts to test the theory at the neighborhood level in other countries have been published, and it appears that social disorganization has the potential to explain levels of deviant behavior outside the United States. In the next section, we describe studies that focus on neighborhood-level analyses across cities outside the United States.

Tests of Social Disorganization in Cities Outside the United States

Breetzke (2010) argues that South Africa provides an excellent setting to test social disorganization theory. He states that

the recent political history of South Africa is inherently intertwined with social disorganization and community fragmentation. While a few examples may exist elsewhere, no other country in the world has endured such a direct and sustained attack on the social fabric of its society through state laws and policies aimed at enforcing and accentuating spatio-social segmentation. (p. 447)

To test social disorganization theory in this context, Breetzke collected data in the city of Tshwane, one of the six largest metropolitan areas in South Africa. The level of analysis was the census-defined suburb, with the number of households in each suburb ranging from 150 to 300.

Three years of violent crime data (2001–2003), including “murder, attempted murder, sexual offenses, assault with the intent to cause grievous bodily harm and common assault,” were culled from the Crime Information Analysis Centre (Breetzke, 2010, p. 448). Address-based data were geocoded and aggregated to the suburb level. These were matched with other 2001 census measures, including ethnic heterogeneity, socioeconomic deprivation, family disruption, and residential mobility (Breetzke, 2010). Several of these variables were quite different in nature from those found in the United States or had potentially different meanings from our understanding in the West. For example, in addition to unemployment (a common measure used in tests of social disorganization theory in the United States), the measure of socioeconomic disadvantage included “type of dwelling, source of water, toilet facilities, refuse or rubbish removal, and energy or fuel for lighting, heating and cooking” (Breetzke, 2010, p. 448). These items are largely irrelevant in industrialized developed nations and were specifically designed by the United Nations Development Programme to assess socioeconomic development in South Africa. Interestingly, given the heterogeneous nature of the country, there was plenty of room to measure various forms of racial and ethnic heterogeneity (as the country has four official racial groups and nine distinct ethnic groups) and linguistic heterogeneity (as the country has 11 official languages). The authors chose to focus simply on the percentage black, given the history of apartheid that segregated “Black African, Colored, Asian, or Indian” individuals who were viewed as nonwhites (Breetzke, 2010, p. 448).

Results were mixed. On the one hand, consistent with social disorganization theory, both measures of socioeconomic deprivation (unemployment and the deprivation index) were statistically and positively related to rates of violent crime. Similarly, residential mobility (the percentage of the population that had moved in the past five years) was positively related to the rate of violent crime. However, the percentage of the suburb characterized as black or nonwhite actually trended in a negative direction and was not statistically significant. This was also the case for the percentage of female-headed households. The race finding is particularly interesting given the history of South Africa and its policy of total segregation. One would think with this shift in policy that desegregated communities would have higher violent crime rates. There may be something statistically odd going on here, but not enough information was provided on the distribution of this variable to comment further. However, given the heterogeneous nature of the country, more work should look at finer measures of racial/ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity.

The fact that the percentage of households headed by women was unrelated to violent crime might be explained by the measurement of the variable. Black South Africans often work far from home and are gone for long periods of time, even though their household census designation is in the home. Thus, because two of the empirical inconsistencies with social disorganization theory may have to do with poor measurement and statistical anomalies, we suggest that the bulk of the evidence supports the predictive ability of social disorganization, at least across suburbs of Tshwane, South Africa.

Moving to Asia, L. Zhang, Messner, and Liu (2007) studied household burglary victimization across neighborhoods in Tianjin, China. The results were interesting and, while somewhat different from what researchers have found in the West, in some ways still supportive of social disorganization theory. First, inconsistent with social disorganization theory, poverty was unrelated to burglary, and residential stability was positively associated with burglary. The former may have something to do with the lack of attractive targets in impoverished neighborhoods canceling out the safer but wealthier neighborhoods. The latter seems somewhat intractable given the various possibilities. Alternatively, collective efficacy was, as expected, negatively associated with burglary, as was the presence of formal agents of social control (the visibility of the police). The perceived effectiveness of neighborhood mediation groups was not a significant predictor of burglary, but this may reflect the amount of mediation going on. That is, if there are many problems, there may be more information to base judgment on (though mediation may appear less effective because there are many problems), but when there are few disputes, there is little to base judgment on. Given these concerns, perceptions of mediation groups may not be the best indicator of the semipublic control the researchers wanted to measure. These findings are supportive of newer versions of social disorganization theory that focus on collective efficacy (social cohesion and informal social control) and social control from the public sector (i.e., the police).

As mentioned, social disorganization theory has mostly been tested in the United States and mostly in urban areas. While a few empirical tests of social disorganization theory in rural areas of the United States have been conducted and have supported the theory (Li, 2011; Osgood & Chambers, 2000), not much has been done outside the country. However, Jobes, Barclay, and Weinand (2004) provided one such test in New South Wales, Australia. They obtained crime data from the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics for 123 local geographic areas. These are the smallest “municipal” units defined by the census and include, on average, fewer than 50,000 residents. Crime data included rates of assault, breaking and entering, malicious damage to property, and motor vehicle theft. The researchers collected 19 different measures from the census that fell under five dimensions of social disorganization theory: (1) low socio-economic status (e.g., unemployment, poverty); (2) residential instability (e.g., living at a different address, living in own home); (3) ethnic heterogeneity (e.g., proportion indigenous); (4) family disruptions (e.g., divorce, sole parent); and (5) population size and density.

Across dimensions of crime, the social disorganization variables explained a good deal of the variation—between 20% and 45% across models. This is similar to

analyses conducted in rural areas in the United States, suggesting that not only is the theory generalizable; its ability to explain variation is about the same across these two countries. Dimensions of social disorganization particularly predictive of the various crimes included measures of ethnic heterogeneity, residential instability, and family disruption.

Another study in Australia, though not directly testing social disorganization theory, per se, does offer some insight on the predictors of indigenous violence among the Australian Aboriginals. Using the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS), Snowball and Weatherburn (2008) examined a number of theoretical explanations to assess violence among Aboriginals. This is a large survey, not specifically designed to test any one theory, but several items pertained to social disorganization. Given what was available and based on social disorganization theory, the authors expected that “violent victimisation would be higher amongst Indigenous Australians who:

- Are not socially involved in their communities
- Are sole parents
- Have high rates of geographic mobility (as measured by the number of times they moved house)
- Are member or have relatives who are member of the stolen generation [those Aboriginals who were removed from their traditional lands by the government]” (p. 222)

With the exception of the first expectation, the results were largely supportive of social disorganization theory. In contrast to the researchers’ expectations, Aboriginals who were involved in their communities were actually more likely to be victimized than those who were more socially isolated. This may have to do with the different environmental and social settings those in the community find themselves in. Alternatively, the odds of a sole parent being victimized were 39% higher than those with a partner, and the odds of members of the stolen generation (or having relatives who were members) being victimized were 71% higher than others. Finally, each additional geographic move increased the odds of being victimized by 33%. Although this is an individual-level examination of a macro-level theory, the data seem to support social disorganization theory. Taken in total, we find significant support for social disorganization theory outside the United States and across several countries.

More Theoretical and Empirical Advances and Divergences: Social and Physical Disorder

Minor misbehavior (e.g., prostitution and public rowdiness or drunkenness) and signs of **physical disorder** (e.g., litter, graffiti, and broken windows) and their relationship to crime have been a concern at least since the 1800s. More than 35 years ago, Wilson and Kelling (1982) published an essay titled “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety” in the *Atlantic Monthly* that brought these issues back into the



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PHOTO 5.3 Can broken windows actually encourage crime and other forms of deviance?

public limelight as well as to the attention of scholars interested in crime and deviance. Basically, the authors argued that disorder leads to greater disorder and attracts and promotes more serious forms of deviance. The notion is simple to young men living in an area characterized by graffiti and broken windows: Why not break another window? It is fun, and what's the harm? Signs of disorder lead to further disorder. This led to the policy implication that police (and other agents of social control) attack crime at its roots and target physical and minor forms of **social disorder** deviance that seem to be critical causes of the escalation of crime and further deviance (public drinking, rowdiness, crowds of teens, etc.). In other words, focus on less serious forms of deviance, and you may deter more serious forms of crime.

Although the two are clearly unique (see Kubrin, 2008), the parallels between the disorder theory and social disorganization theory are fairly obvious. The key to social disorganization theory is the ability of residents to control delinquency and crime, things that most everyone would like to minimize. Similarly, there are some areas where residents are able to minimize social and physical disorder (e.g., adults drinking, unsupervised youth, trash, and graffiti) and other areas where residents have difficulty minimizing disorder. Physical and social disorder are presumably things that most people would like to avoid if they had the ability to control them or could afford to live in “better” neighborhoods.

Considerable research links physical and social disorder with more serious street crimes. Skogan's (1990) *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American Neighborhoods*, for example, provides a compelling argument and data detailing that disorder is a major root cause of urban crime. His later work, “Disorder and Decline: The State of Research” (2015), provides an up-to-date overview of the progress made since Wilson and Kelling's (1982) seminal article. Obviously a proponent, he states that disorder has broad implications for public health and safety and that it is deeply implicated in the dynamics of neighborhood stability and change. Further, there is evidence that—directly and via its impact on other features of community life—disorder stimulates conventional crime. The theory is not without critics. For example, Harcourt (2001) argues that not enough empirical attention has been given to the causal link between disorder and crime, and he claims the policies (e.g., zero-tolerance policies) drawn from the “theory” are often inappropriate and/or ineffective. Sampson and Raudenbush (2004) are also less optimistic of the potential of the theory. They provided a very unique empirical test of the relationship between disorder and crime and found that while the two are correlated, factors including poverty and the concentration of minority groups are even stronger predictors of crime than social and physical disorder. Because it is simple and appealing to the public and public officials, Wilson and Kelling's (1982) **broken windows theory** will likely remain active and persuasive in terms of policies and practices. Why not focus on problems residents are concerned with, even if they don't have a causal link to more serious crime? In fact, social and physical disorder may really simply be “less serious” crime and deviance.

Collective Efficacy

Another advance in social disorganization theory came from Robert Sampson and his colleagues (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997), who drew an analogy between **individual efficacy** (i.e., an individual's ability to accomplish a task) and neighborhood or **collective efficacy** (i.e., a neighborhood's ability to recognize common goals of a safe environment that is largely free from crime and deviance). They defined collective efficacy as "social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on the behalf of the common good" (p. 918). **Social cohesion** and trust between neighbors are seen as necessary conditions for residents to be willing to intervene for the common good. Basically, the authors made the argument that collective efficacy is an important mediating effect between structural factors associated with social disorganization and deviant behavior, particularly violent behavior.

Sampson et al. (1997) examined data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods. Government-defined census tracts are often used as the unit of analysis to characterize neighborhoods. This is a reasonable strategy but nowhere near perfect as they often have arbitrary borders that do not reflect what residents perceive to be "their neighborhood." To get a better measure of neighborhoods, the researchers combined 847 Chicago census tracts into 343 neighborhood clusters in an attempt to create a unit of analysis that made meaningful sense in terms of composition and geographic boundaries (e.g., roads and waterways). They interviewed 8,782 residents across all neighborhood clusters in the residents' homes. They measured "informal social control" by asking respondents how likely their neighbors could be counted on to intervene in various ways if

- children were skipping school and hanging out on a street corner,
- children were spray-painting a building,
- children were showing disrespect to an adult,
- a fight broke out in front of their house, or
- the fire station closest to the house was threatened with budget cuts.

Cohesion and trust were measured by asking respondents how strongly they agreed with the following:

- People around here are willing to help their neighbors.
- This is a close-knit neighborhood.
- People in this neighborhood can be trusted.
- People in this neighborhood generally don't get along with each other.
- People in this neighborhood do not share the same values.

The two scales were so highly correlated at the neighborhood level that they were combined into a single composite scale termed "collective efficacy."

Structural variables related to social disorganization theory included concentrated disadvantage, immigrant concentration, and a lack of residential stability. The dependent measures of violence included perceived violence in the neighborhood and violent victimization from the neighborhood survey and the homicide rate from official records. Sampson et al. (1997) were able to assess the influence of structural variables on collective efficacy and the mediating effect of collective efficacy on violence. The results were consistent and robust. The structural variables were clearly related to collective efficacy, and collective efficacy, in turn, affected each measure of violence. The results strongly supported this modified version of social disorganization theory.

Subsequent to this publication, numerous studies have examined the role that collective efficacy plays on violence and other forms of deviance as well as reactions to deviance (e.g., residents' fear of crime). For example, Bernasco and Block (2009) found that collective efficacy keeps robbers out of certain census tracts in Chicago while D. Martin (2002) found that social capital (politically active citizens) and collective efficacy (active community organizations) were negatively related to burglary across Detroit neighborhoods in the mid-1990s. Browning (2002) showed that the effects of collective efficacy extend beyond violence and street crime to affect intimate partner violence, and Cancino (2005) showed that collective efficacy not only is important in inner cities but applies to nonmetropolitan areas as well.

J. Wright and Cullen (2001) developed the analogous concept of **parental efficacy**, which is focused on parents' ability to control their children's behavior through parent-child attachment, rules, supervision, and also social support. B. H. Rankin and Quane (2002) linked these ideas directly to the community and examined how collective efficacy leads to greater parental efficacy, which leads to greater social competency and lower levels of problem behavior among children. More recently, Simons and his colleagues (Simons, Simons, Burt, Brody, & Cutrona, 2005) showed that collective efficacy promoted positive parenting strategies and that both were related to lower levels of deviant peer association and delinquency involvement. More interestingly, they found that authoritative parenting had pronounced effects in communities with higher levels of collective efficacy, suggesting that both factors are important in themselves but that in conjunction the effects are even stronger.

In a more recent study, Berg and Rengifo (2009) focused on robbery and the role of informal social control in the presence of illicit drug markets. They too moved beyond a sole focus on structural characteristics emphasized in social disorganization theory and actually included measures of informal social control, very close to measures of collective efficacy, as critical mediating factors between structural variables and robbery. They argue that the structural factors discussed above negatively affect residents' ability to regulate behavior, keep out drug market activity, and control serious violent crimes, such as robbery.

Berg and Rengifo's study focused on 66 block groups purposively selected to obtain variation in drug activity in the Kentucky cities of Louisville and Lexington. Block groups are aggregations of several blocks and are smaller units than census tracts. In fact, census tracts are usually aggregations of two or more block groups. In some cities, block groups are even more accurate depictions of "neighborhoods" than census tracts, but this is not always the case. Survey data were collected from just over 2,300

residents of these neighborhoods to measure informal social control and perceptions of drug market activity. Perceptions of drug market activity were measured by two items that asked how often people bought or sold drugs in the neighborhood and how often people used drugs in the neighborhood. Informal social control was measured with a scale consisting of items similar to the intervention variables described in Sampson and his colleagues' (1997) work. These variables were aggregated to the block group level.

Structural variables came from the census and included residential instability (percentage of renters and the percentage of the population residing somewhere else five years earlier); concentrated disadvantage (e.g., percentage living in poverty, unemployment, and female-headed households); and population age structure (percentage aged 15–29, a high-risk age group for criminal activity). Robbery data came from crimes known to the local city police agencies. The purposive sampling led to significant variation in neighborhood characteristics. For example, the percentage reporting that drug market activity occurred frequently ranged from 0% to 88%, and robbery rates ranged from 0 to 60 per 1,000 residents. Further, unemployment ranged from 0% to 57%, and population turnover (instability) ranged from 12% to 86%.

Structural equation modeling was employed, which allowed the researchers to tease out direct and indirect effects of structural characteristics, informal social control, and drug market activity on rates of robbery. The analyses began with bivariate correlations, and as expected, concentrated disadvantage and residential instability were negatively related to informal social control and positively related to drug market activity and robbery rates. More complex models suggest that the effect of concentrated disadvantage is indirect, working by negatively affecting informal social control and positively affecting the presence of drug market activity, which directly affects rates of robbery. Residential instability also appears to lower informal social controls, in turn affecting drug market activity, which has the strongest direct effect on rates of robbery.

Clearly, collective efficacy has proven to be an important concept that has extended and promoted thought on social disorganization theory and on factors that affect neighborhood deviance. Indeed, Pratt and Cullen's (2005) meta-analysis of macro-structural correlates of crime included 13 effect sizes of the relationship between collective efficacy and crime—all were statistically significant and robust predictors. For the most part, research in this area has been largely restricted to violence and other forms of crime, and little attention has been given to collective efficacy's potential implication for other forms of deviance. More research in this direction is clearly warranted.

Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites With Social Disorganization Theory

The emphasis on economic deprivation—which encourages population turnover, can lead to racial and ethnic heterogeneity, and ultimately affects the ability to work together toward common community goals such as reducing crime and deviance—is

clearly evoked in virtually all versions of social disorganization theory. Indeed, the vast majority of research testing social disorganization theory has emphasized “crime in the streets.” But can social disorganization be utilized to explain “deviance in the suites,” or elite deviance? It would appear so.

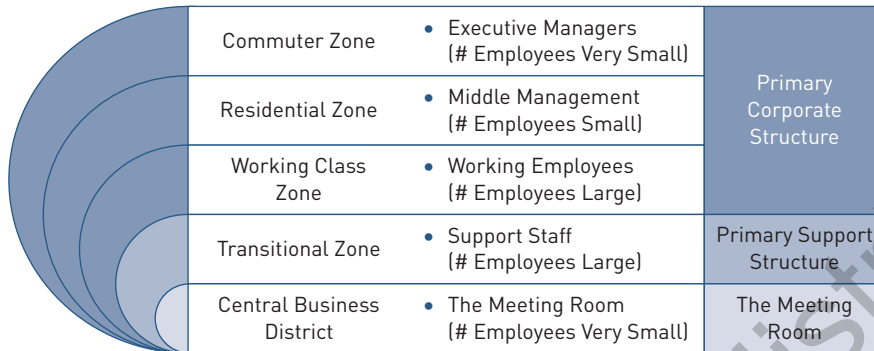
Almost 80 years ago in 1940, Edwin Sutherland published the article “White-Collar Criminality,” and while in it he primarily emphasized his theory of differential association (see Chapter 6), he also alluded to social disorganization. Just as in socially disorganized, lower-class neighborhoods, conflicting pressures exist in the business community. Sutherland argued that “a second general process is social disorganization in the community” (p. 11), which allows for differential association. He further argued that white-collar offenders can operate because the business community cannot confront the powerful business leaders, and the agencies that are commissioned to handle white-collar crime typically focus on lower-level crimes (e.g., “street crime”), ignoring those at their own level.

In his efforts to revitalize social disorganization theory after a period of dismissal, Bursik (1988) argued that the theory might be pushed beyond the study of street crime. He wrote:

If the notion of the “group” is expanded from the neighbourhood to any collectivity with an interest in self-regulations, then white collar crime might easily be explained within a similar framework. In this respect, the notion of the organization would supplant the notion of community. It would then be possible to determine the extent to which high rates of employee turnover and employee heterogeneity affect the ability of the organization to regulate itself and, in turn, whether this ability is related to white collar crime. (p. 536)

Two articles have recently emerged that take Bursik’s suggestion to heart and attempt to draw more direct links between social disorganization theory and corporate and occupational crime. In “The Corporation as a City,” Clubb (2014) links the corporate structure to Shaw and McKay’s (1942/1969) concentric zone model (see Figure 5.4). As adapted in the figure, one can think of the executive managers as residents in the Commuter Zone and playing their role at the top of the corporate ladder. Members of middle management come from the Residential Zone and represent those with greater education and skill sets and, while not at the executive level, have better-paying jobs, more security, and more flexibility than general working-class employees (Working Class Zone) who have relatively stable employment and some education or post-high school training. Below that level and, according to Clubb, clearly set apart from the working class is the Transitional Zone consisting of “support staff” who make less money and have less stable employment, fewer benefits, and less flexibility on the job—this is the zone in transition where education and pay is relatively low and population turnover relatively high. These employees move around frequently and only hope to secure jobs in the more stable Working Class Zone. Finally, at the core of the concentric zone is the Central Business District, or, as labeled by Clubb, “The Meeting Room,” that regularly brings together executive managers and at times brings in middle managers as needed.

While Clubb (2014) draws a unique insight into how, in many ways, corporate structures fit a concentric zone model, it is not exactly clear where this should take

FIGURE 5.4 • Corporate Structure as It Relates to a Concentric Zone Model


Commuter Zone	• Executive Managers (# Employees Very Small)	Primary Corporate Structure
Residential Zone	• Middle Management (# Employees Small)	
Working Class Zone	• Working Employees (# Employees Large)	
Transitional Zone	• Support Staff (# Employees Large)	Primary Support Structure
Central Business District	• The Meeting Room (# Employees Very Small)	The Meeting Room

Source: Adapted from Clubb (2014, p. 197).

us theoretically or empirically. Alternatively, J. Davis and Holland-Davis (2015) draw linkages between structural characteristics of neighborhoods (disadvantage, residential mobility, and racial and ethnic heterogeneity) and organizational characteristics (workplace marginality, employee turnover, and employee heterogeneity). Linking these structural characteristics to the mediating characteristics of neighborhood (i.e., friendship networks, collective efficacy, and formal controls) with those in the workplace (i.e., friendship networks, collective efficacy, managerial climate, and support) helps us to think about how the organizational context resembles neighborhoods and allows us to develop specific hypotheses. We might think about corporations characterized by a marginalized workforce (concentrated disadvantage) and wonder whether they will have higher workplace deviance than those where workers are treated more equitably. When we think about neighborhood racial and ethnic heterogeneity, we might consider how that will play out in the workforce. Or we could take it a step further and think about other forms of heterogeneity (e.g., educational background, skill sets, and training) and how they might allow for lower levels of communication and control and hence higher levels of deviance. Table 5.1 describes potential links between systemic social disorganization of neighborhoods and disorganization in the workplace.

Both of these articles go a long way in moving the language and vision of social disorganization theory away from the streets and into the suites of the corporate world. Another expansion of the theory comes from Rothe and her colleagues (see Rothe & Kauzlarich, 2010; Rothe & Mullins, 2009) who have incorporated social disorganization theory into various frameworks for understanding state crime. Rothe and Kauzlarich (2010) argue that

essentially, when strong, functioning social institutions are not present, this creates both motivation and opportunity for organized criminal activity. . . . Weak institutions produce a vacuum of formal and informal social control. A nation unable to adequately police or subdue paramilitary force in its hinterlands creates a gap of institutional control that provides motivation and opportunity for the aris[ing] of organized criminal activity. (p. 169)

TABLE 5.1 ● Concepts From Systemic Social Disorganization Theory and Workplace Disorganization	
Systemic Social Disorganization	Workplace Disorganization
Structural Characteristics	Organizational Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrated Disadvantage • Residential Mobility • Racial/Ethnic Heterogeneity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace Marginality • Employee Turnover • Employee Heterogeneity
Neighborhood Characteristics	Workplace Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood Friendship Networks • Collective Efficacy • Mobilization of Formal Controls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Friendship Networks • Workgroup Collective Efficacy • Managerial Climate and Availability of Formal Support

Source: Adapted from J. Davis and Holland-Davis (2015, p. 268).

Their emphasis on social institutions, such as the family, education, and religion, and on the ability or inability to control behavior at the state level is clearly in line with the social disorganization tradition. Can you think of other forms of elite deviance that might be enabled by the presence of weak institutions and a lack of informal social controls?

Ideas in Action: Programs and Policy From Social Disorganization and Broken Windows Perspectives

A number of programs and policies have come out of social disorganization theory and variations on it, especially Wilson and Kelling's (1982) broken windows theory. Regarding the former, probably the largest program that has become institutionalized is the Chicago Area Project (CAP), which began in the 1930s. Based directly on social disorganization theory and led by sociologist and major contributor to social disorganization theory Clifford Shaw, the CAP sought the following:

1. The development of youth welfare organizations among residents of delinquency areas
2. Employment of so-called indigenous workers wherever possible
3. The fostering and preservation of the independence of these groups (Kobrin, 1959, p. 24)

The CAP emphasized the individual delinquent in the social context that created the delinquency. In contrast to psychological and psychiatric approaches, the CAP was sociological in nature and emphasized the social milieu that encouraged (or at least did not *discourage*) delinquency in certain parts of the city. It also emphasized the lack of social organizations (i.e., organized sports with adult supervision) in certain areas of the city that were readily available to middle-class adolescents. Although solid statistical evidence of the effectiveness of the CAP to reduce delinquency remains evasive (see Schlossman & Sedlak, 1983, for a detailed discussion of these issues), most researchers agree that there were many benefits of the intervention. Kobrin (1959) makes three important points in this regard. First, the project showed that youth welfare organizations could be developed even in the most impoverished areas of the city with the highest rates of delinquency. Second, the project showed that citizens in high-crime areas could be made aware of the common problems shared by residents and mobilized to take action to confront delinquency and other social problems. Additionally, many of the neighborhood programs created remained stable and active over time. Third, it has been argued that

in all probability, the Area Project was the first organized program in the United States to use workers to establish direct and personal contact with “unreached” boys to help them find their way back to acceptable norms of conduct. The adoption of this pattern in many cities during recent years may be regarded as in part, at least, a contribution of the Area Project. (Kobrin, 1959, p. 25)

Other programs that are somewhat consistent with social disorganization theory are community policing and neighborhood watch programs. Community-policing policies and programs attempt to bring law enforcement into the community to work directly with residents to help solve problems and prevent crime and other forms of deviance. The shift from a “paramilitary-bureaucratic” organizational structure to a “friendlier” community-based model of crime prevention has been uneven at best. Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce (2010) argue that even though police academies often espouse community ideals, the training and socialization that takes place in them actually emphasizes and reinforces the paramilitary ideals advocated in earlier decades.

Neighborhood watch programs, often associated with civic leagues, attempt to bring residents together to solve problems themselves. They link often dissimilar residents (based, for example, on race, ethnicity, and/or social class) who might not normally interact together to work to solve common problems, such as crime and other forms of deviance. Bennett, Holloway, and Farrington (2006) conducted a meta-analysis and concluded that 15 of the 18 studies they reviewed showed at least some evidence of these programs’ effectiveness. They did raise several questions about the quality of the studies, however, and recommend that more rigorous evaluations be conducted.

Finally, policies and programs related to broken windows theory generally focus on stopping low-level criminal activity before it escalates. This might involve

enforcement of city code violations related to broken or abandoned vehicles, litter, graffiti, loud music, and the consumption of alcohol in public. Often there is an emphasis on zero-tolerance police policies. O'Shea (2006) offers a unique and important analysis of Wilson and Kelling's (1982) broken windows argument. He argues that the relationships between physical deterioration, disorder, and crime are not straightforward or additive. Rather, physical deterioration interacts with social disorder to affect levels of crime. Another way of thinking about this is that the effect of disorder on crime is dependent on levels of physical disorder (or vice versa). O'Shea finds statistical support for this hypothesis that leads him to be skeptical of simple zero-tolerance policies. He argues that "simple arrests

NOW YOU . . . USE THE THEORY

The map in Figure 5.5 is of Norfolk, Virginia. The dots represent prostitution arrests, and the shaded areas represent different levels of social disorganization as measured by a scale based on the level of racial heterogeneity, number of female-headed households, level of unemployment, and level of poverty in a certain area. The top of the map represents the section of the city next to the bay. This section was very popular many years ago but fell into disrepute. Since it is on the water, there has been some gentrification

recently, and wealthier individuals and business owners have moved back and reclaimed the space as a desirable area. The southern end of the map is where the central business district is located.

Using social disorganization theory, explain the location of prostitution arrests in Norfolk. Can you use the theory to help explain how these arrests are clustered in the city? Why might these arrests be clustered on the edge of the most disorganized areas of the city?

FIGURE 5.5 ● Arrests of Female Prostitutes Over Social Disorganization



of the disorderly (however broadly defined) and citation of negligent property owners . . . may not be the most efficient use of those scarce law enforcement resources” (O’Shea, 2006, p. 185).

Conclusion

The original work of Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) was clearly groundbreaking in its day and continues to influence the study of deviance. The major contribution of the original work was showing how crime, deviance, and other social problems cannot be understood, at least at the aggregate level, by using “types of people” explanations. Shaw and McKay found that crime and deviance were consistently located in particular parts of Chicago, even though the types of people who resided there changed across several decades. New versions of the theory continue to help us understand the factors that limit social control in certain neighborhoods.

Places such as Henry Horner Homes in Alex Kotlowitz’s (1988) *There Are No Children Here* continue to have high rates of crime and deviance because (1) the residents there do not have the resources (political or economic) to control these activities; (2) there is high residential instability or population turnover, resulting in limited social networking, which might lead to decreased social control; and (3) there is very little collective efficacy in that residents lack the willingness and ability to intervene when problems confront them. Most people residing in truly disadvantaged neighborhoods do not engage in a great deal of crime and deviance, and most would love to live in less dangerous places where they could raise their children safely without the opportunities and pressures to deviate. They stay because their opportunities are strictly limited.

Exercises and Discussion Questions

1. Explain how Shaw and McKay’s (1942/1969) theory moved us away from “types of people” explanations.
2. Why do you think we are so focused on individual-level explanations rather than on characteristics of social contexts?
3. How does the work of Sampson and his colleagues (1997) expand our understanding of social disorganization theory?
4. How does Wilson and Kelling’s (1982) broken windows theory relate to social disorganization?
5. Consider the city you live in and where the safe areas are as well as where one might likely go to buy drugs or find a prostitute. What other factors characterize those areas of the city?
6. Go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=nij3liURCnE for a presentation of Chicago’s deadliest neighborhoods, and write a personal reaction to the video.

Key Terms

Broken windows theory 108

Central business district 97

Collective efficacy 109

Concentric zones 97

Cross-sectional designs 98

Individual efficacy 109

Longitudinal data 98

Parental efficacy 110

Physical disorder 107

Population turnover 98

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